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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LAHORE 000715

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AEMR](#) [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [KFLO](#) [MARR](#) [PINR](#) [AMGT](#) [PK](#)

SUBJECT: PML-N WILL NOT BOYCOTT ELECTIONS

CLASSIFIED BY: Michael T. Jordan, Acting Principal Officer,
AMCONSUL Lahore, STATE.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (S) SUMMARY: According to a close confidant of Nawaz Sharif, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) does not/not intend to boycott elections but will continue publicly and privately to threaten to do so in order to extract concessions from the government by insisting on the selection of a new, impartial chief Election Commissioner and the postponement of elections scheduled for January 8 to March 2008. In addition, Nawaz refuses to reconcile with the senior PML-Q leadership, hopes to see himself as the next Prime Minister, his brother Shahbaz as Punjab Chief Minister, and plans to constitutionally remove President Pervez Musharraf from office in cooperation with the PPP if the two parties combined have a two-thirds majority of seats in the next National Assembly. Euphoric over Nawaz's return, PML-N officials clearly are exaggerating their electoral prospects, but it is telling that Musharraf's own party leader already is courting Nawaz. End summary.

¶2. (S) The day after Nawaz's return to Lahore, Poloff met with former PML-N Punjab Member of the Provincial Assembly Rana Mashhood Ahmed Khan to discuss recent political developments. Khan said "off the record" that the PML-N will not carry out with its threat to boycott elections scheduled for January 8 but will continue to threaten to do so in order to extract concessions from the government. At the top of the list is the appointment of a new and impartial chief election commissioner and the postponement of elections until March 2008. Nawaz intends to use the additional two months to criss-cross the country in order to build up PML-N's organization strength and Nawaz's popularity after eight years of exile. Khan also said that Nawaz believes the Saudi royal family intends to continue to pressure Musharraf to ensure that the PML-N faces a level electoral playing field.

¶3. (S) Nawaz also told his party leadership that he will not reconcile with certain key Pakistan Muslim League (PML) leaders, especially former Prime Minister Chaudhry Shujaat Hussain, former Punjab Chief Minister Chaudhry Pervez Elahi, former Federal Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed and former Federal Minister Religious Affairs Minister Ijaz ul-Haq. According to Khan, Shujaat telephoned senior PML-N leader Chaudhary Nisaar Ali Khan last night and requested a meeting with Nawaz but the latter refused to entertain it. Khan said that Musharraf's PML party is disintegrating and to reinforce his point claimed that already 21 PML members of the just dissolved National Assembly

are in negotiations with Nawaz to jump ship.

14. (S) Khan also predicted optimistically that if the PML-N wins the national and Punjab provincial elections, Nawaz would become Prime Minister and Shahbaz would again become Punjab Chief Minister. If Nawaz's prior convictions prevent him from holding the position, Shahbaz would then take the PM position. In any case, Nawaz seems to believe that his presidential pardon removes any legal impediments to his holding elected office and that Saudi pressure would ensure a decision favorable to him. Nawaz filed papers today to run for a National Assembly seat, his wife Kulsoom Nawaz will run for another National Assembly seat, Shahbaz will run for the National Assembly as well as for a Punjab Provincial Assembly seat, and his wife Hamza Shahbaz filed papers to run for a National Assembly seat. Khan also said if the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) and PML-N combined garner a two-thirds majority in the National Assembly, Nawaz intends to collaborate with Benazir Bhutto to constitutionally remove Musharraf from the office of President.

15. (S) Bio Note: Khan, an IV alumnus, and his family are close and trusted confidants of Nawaz Sharif. He was born on August 26, 1966 in Lahore and is an attorney by profession. The night before Nawaz returned to Lahore police forces detained him in the possible opening stages of a crackdown. From the jail he was able to call Nawaz in Saudi Arabia and told him of his plight. Nawaz told him to hold tight and that he would inform the Saudi royal family. Several minutes later he claimed that he was released, and he credited Saudi intervention not only for his own release but for the avoidance of a massive government crackdown similar to what occurred the days preceding Nawaz's first attempt to return on September 10. Khan eventually joined up with Nawaz at the airport and accompanied him to the Data Gunj Buksh Shrine. He claimed that Nawaz was very emotional and could not help but cry upon his arrival in Lahore.

16. (U) In a related development, Nawaz Sharif held a press

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conference after filing his election papers and denied that there was any American pressure or role in his return to Pakistan. He said he would cooperate with other opposition parties on electoral strategy, would not permit Pakistan to become another Iraq, and refused to join hands with the PML. Nawaz claimed that Musharraf failed to end terrorism in Pakistan, said that the religious parties were not extremists, and publicly warned that elections would be boycotted if the demands of the APDM were not met and accused the ruling party of already rigging the election.

17. (C) There were only limited reports of political violence in Lahore and nothing spiraled out of control. However, the son of former Chief Minister Pervez Elahi, Moonis Elahi, was the target of a small mob of lawyers who pelted him with rocks and sticks as he departed the election office after filing his nomination papers. One source claimed that police nearby did nothing to intervene—an astonishing development if true since police inaction in this instance would have been unimaginable only several days ago. Television cameras caught the event on tape. Reports indicate Moonis escaped serious injury.

18. (S) Comment: PML-N leaders clearly are euphoric over Nawaz's return, and their predictions of electoral victory are both exaggerated and premature. Other than providing monetary assistance, we doubt the Saudis will engage any further on Nawaz's behalf in Pakistan. Most interesting, however, is the fact that Musharraf's party chief, Chaudhry Shujaat, is already courting Nawaz.

19. (U) Embassy Islamabad cleared on this cable.
JORDAN